



# GP48 – Responding to a Serious Incident in the School Community 2022



<b>Last Review Date</b>	November 2022	<b>Next Review Date</b>	November 2024
<b>Leader of Policy Review</b>	Governors, Headteacher		
<b>Associated Policies</b>	This policy links to our policies on Safeguarding, WSA to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing, Medical Needs, Challenging Bullying, PSE Policy		

## Overview

<b>POLICY</b>	Serious Incidents in the School Community policy
<b>OWNER</b>	Principal Educational Psychologist
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<b>REVIEWED BY</b>	
<b>DATE OF LAST REVIEW</b>	
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<b>RELATED DOCUMENTS</b>	

## Revision History

Version	Issue Date	Author	Summary of Changes

## Consultation

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## Approval

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## Section One: Introduction

We are all aware of the shattering effect that serious incidents can have on a school community.

Such events include the serious injury or death of a pupil, a teacher or other member of the school community.

The guidance contained in this document recognises that, in times of distress, children, young people and adults will turn for support to the people they know and trust. And school staff will have a key role in providing support to their pupils, staff and families.

When the need arises, school leaders and staff need to know who they can turn to and what resources can be provided for them.

Finally, young people need to learn to cope with grief and distress as part of their education for life. This guidance contains some recommended reference materials to facilitate this learning process.

## Purpose

The council has procedures in place to deal with large scale emergency situations requiring coordinated multi-agency responses of the emergency services, outlined in *School Guide to Managing On Site and Off Site Emergencies published by Flintshire County Council Corporate Health & Safety*. Such events utilise designated school buildings as rest and support centres, as needed, but they do not require the school leadership team to manage the incident.

The focus of this document is where a serious incident involves the school community directly and personally, typically an incident that involves the unexpected serious injury to, or death of, a member or members of the school community.

## Scope

The document is designed to be used by schools and educational settings to structure their own individualised responses to serious incidents that impact their setting and local community.

## Aims

- (i) To support school managers to plan for, and deal effectively with, the initial stages of a serious incident
- (ii) To help school leaders recognise the emotional support needs of the whole school community
- (iii) To suggest ways in which these needs can be addressed and
- (iv) To provide and signpost appropriate up to date resources

### How to use this document

It is intended that this paper should be read and discussed by the senior members of staff who would be in the position of 'managing' should their school experience a serious incident. School leaders are invited to take the information provided, discuss with key colleagues and customise it to meet their own individual requirements.

This paper works best as a working document and 'customised' to the particular organisational structures of each school. It is designed as a resource to be referred back to if, and when, required; it should therefore be shared and kept in a suitable location.

The broad plan developed for each school should be reviewed regularly as part of a planned process and, in particular, following changes of key staff.

If you would like to discuss further ways to build your school's capacity to deal with bereavement and significant and stressful events, please contact your link EP or [linda.callaghan@flinthsire.gov.uk](mailto:linda.callaghan@flinthsire.gov.uk) for details of current training and support.

## Section Two: Planning

### The need to prepare

By their very nature, serious incidents are unpredictable and it is natural to respond with a sense of shock and disbelief. School managers find themselves having to make quick decisions at a time when thinking clearly can be challenging.

In such circumstances, good decisions are harder to reach and managing the needs of the whole school community can feel overwhelming. Having a workable plan to help leaders navigate such times can be reassuring, help reduce stress on staff at all levels and ensure that events are responded to as sensitively as possible.

### Plan for communicating bad news

Consider the mode of communication; where it is felt that telephone contact is preferable, a calling tree system spreads the load e.g. School Leadership Team (SLT) inform designated promoted staff who notify subject or class teachers who contact their teams. Notify key staff as soon as possible, even if the time seems inconvenient, as it will provide more thinking time.

### Breaking news and managing the first day

Consider starting with one of our suggested plans outlined in Section Three

### **Who are your Key Contacts and how will you contact them when an incident occurs?**

Each school should take time to consider who their key contacts would be in the event of a Critical Incident and to ensure contact information is up to date and readily accessible. It can be the case that an incident occurs after school hours. The following list provides some suggestions:

- Head Teacher and Senior teaching staff
- Relevant Head of Service (Education)
- Chairperson of Board of Governors
- Church or other faith or community leader relevant to your school community • Site management staff
- Admin staff. Staff should know how to proceed if they take the initial call, and how to respond to queries from parents, press and other in the event of an incident. It may be appropriate to designate a telephone in school for incoming calls only and provide the Local Authority with this number.

#### *Where required:*

- The Principal Educational Psychologist can help senior leaders plan their response and debrief senior staff
- YPCS Lead Counsellor can advise pastoral staff and allocate on-site checkins. This is not counselling but a check in on feelings and emotions in the aftermath of the event. Should any young person require extra support or counselling sessions then a referral can be made via YPCS.

Lead Counsellor will allocate counsellors to visit the school as soon as possible after the event. If this is after the weekend or holiday counsellors may not arrive on-site until late morning. In High schools the counsellor for the school will be deployed and another e.g. lead counsellor. For primary schools lead counsellor will attend accompanied by two other counsellors.

- HR can provide additional staff support
- Flintshire County Council Corporate Communications

See Appendix 2 for a template Key Contact List

### Section Three: Plans to help deal with a Serious Incident

Serious incidents can happen during the school day as well as overnight, weekends and in the holidays. With social media and mobile phones news of tragic events is likely to spread fast. You will be well placed to respond quickly as you have a usable plan that you can adapt to the circumstances and time of day you hear the news.

Reactions to an incident will vary; some children and adults will not appear affected, some will be affected directly and some will be indirectly affected, perhaps as a result of personal experiences unknown to you. The aim should be a sensitive response to the range of reactions and a focus on a return to normal routines as soon as possible.

Each serious incident is a unique event in its own right and cannot be legislated for. What follows is therefore **a flexible framework** that should result in senior staff feeling prepared, supported and able to respond as events unfold.

The following template timetables for the day of, or first day after, the incident are easily adaptable for primary and secondary schools and settings.

#### Suggested Timetable for Day: Primary

Normal routines should be adhered to wherever reasonable but a possible structure for the first day might be:

##### **Before school (or during an extended break if news of incident comes during school day)**

- Staff briefing where there will be updated facts and a discussion of what staff will say to children in broad terms.
- Clarification of support for pupils and staff ( Senior and support staff within school and any outside support)
- Identify vulnerable groups and how senior and support staff will be available to them
- Time for questions and reflections

##### **During the day**

- Class or small group sessions where staff 'break the news'. Even if children already know about the event then it is still important for their teachers to acknowledge the event and

create a safe place to deliver the facts and model reflections and emotional responses. Children need a safe place to ask questions and share reflections, emotional and experiences.

- Sensitive return to “normal” routines and timetable with an expectation that work may not be a priority for some, whilst others may prefer to busy themselves with ‘getting on’

#### **Lunchtime**

- Offer a staff catch to share children’s responses, share any particular concerns about pupils, update information and recoup
- By end of day by email Communication to parents and carers outlining the facts as they are known and ways to support their children.( See Appendix 4 for suggested text)

#### **Before children go home**

- Class based opportunity to come together. For younger children this might be a favourite story about feeling safe and loved but for older children it might be a time to share reflections and a reminder that it’s ok to feel sad and upset, even scared, but we have adults who can help us with these feelings.

#### **After school**

- Whole staff meeting to debrief and reflect on the day’s events. Reminder of social media policy and support available
- Leadership team debrief

### Suggested Timetable for Day: Secondary

Normal routines should be adhered to wherever reasonable but a possible structure for the first day might be:

#### **Before school (or during an extended break if news of incident comes during school day)**

- Staff briefing including updated facts and a discussion of what staff will say to young people in broad terms (share Appendix 3). Discussion should anticipate that pupils will share news via phones with parents and others. Consider asking them to message only parents and to avoid social media as the news will be very raw to some people and not everything they read on social media will be true.
- Identification of vulnerable groups – pupils who might be most directly affected- and how these might best be supported (see section below on ‘Identification of vulnerable groups’ for further details).
- Arrangements for increased support for pupils

#### **For Staff**

- Clarification of support for staff (see Appendix 6.2)
- Opportunities for reflections and sharing

#### **Planned session where staff ‘break the news’ to pupils (again, see Appendix 3 for a suggested format for this session)**

- This is most likely to be in a tutor groups or groups of a smaller size. In some circumstances school management may judge that early assemblies for each year group, given by an appropriate member of SMT, will be appropriate. The pupils will be given updated facts. However, bringing large numbers of upset pupils together may create additional anxiety and should therefore be carefully considered within the context of the incident and an understanding of the pupils.
- An alternative would be, a delayed bell at the beginning of the day. This could provide senior staff with an opportunity to meet with key class groups to inform pupils and to explain what will be happening.
- It may be helpful for a Senior Manager or pastoral staff to tour areas of the school/join colleagues who are finding it difficult to manage the feelings generated. A colleague popping



in to a lesson can be supportive and communicates to children and young people that the school community is acting coherently and supporting each other.

- Sensitive return to “normal” routines and timetable with an expectation that work may not be a priority for some, whilst others may prefer to busy themselves with ‘getting on’

#### **Lunchtime**

- Staff drop-in to share pupil’s responses, share any particular concerns about pupils
- Be aware that emotions may be running high especially amongst vulnerable groups

#### **End of day**

- Class based check in and reminder of helplines for those who need to talk to someone overnight and for those most closely effected and vulnerable groups (See Appendix 6)

#### **By the end of the day**

- Communication to parents via email or letter (see Appendix 4)

#### **After school**

- Whole staff meeting to debrief, identify any concerns about pupils and reflect on the day’s events
- SLT meet to debrief and plan next steps

#### **Notify Staff**

Provide all staff with the following information:

- A summary of the facts as they are currently known – information frequently changes or is confused in these situations
- The time and location of an initial briefing for staff (before school/the next session).
- Any preliminary plans. It is generally helpful for children to be told ‘bad news’ in class sized groups by familiar adults (see ‘telling children bad news’). If possible, bring children together for an extended registration to be informed in an age appropriate way of key pieces of established facts around the incident and any changes planned to their normal routine.
- Designate key tasks where appropriate.
- Notify support staff, in time to prepare them for their role in supporting pupils. **Prepare a before-school/ between session staff briefing to include: -**

- Updated facts
- Discussion of what staff will say to children and young people in broad terms
- Clarification of support for staff. Some people will have suffered similar bereavements or be experiencing particular life-stresses and they may be especially upset
- Permission and safe opportunities for adults to be upset
- Allow an opportunity for staff to discuss any concerns too.

#### Identification of vulnerable groups

It is important to identify any particularly vulnerable groups. These may include:

- The affected class/year
- Friends in other year groups/schools
- Siblings in other year groups/schools
- Children who have their own experience of bereavement loss and/ or trauma
- Children and young people who are in families under stress or who are Looked After
- Children and young people who are known to have experienced difficulties in managing their emotional wellbeing
- Children who are socially excluded

#### Arrangements for increased support of vulnerable children and young people.

Staff may need to monitor how these groups of children and young people are coping and provide them with greater supervision or pastoral support. Children who are vulnerable are likely to need more security and this can be provided by a sensitive adherence to routines and appropriate boundaries. Keeping children in familiar groups provides continuity and coherence and a balance of reactions and coping strategies within their peer group.

Vulnerable children in particular may have important relationships with support workers and this may need to be timetabled into the day. Suggest the setting up of a specific area or base that will be staffed and where pupils can attend if they are particularly upset, with permission from staff. If the incident involves a possible or suspected suicide (see section on 'Suspected suicide' of this document)

The principles remain the same

- **Take control of what is communicated to your school community; acknowledge the incident and keep to the facts.**

- **Acknowledge that adults and children will want to be supported by people they know and trust. Consider using external support staff to support you and your staff in doing this.**
- **Identify vulnerable groups and be wise to the ways they may respond**

### Communication with parents and carers

Where possible, consider your process for communicating with parents regarding important incidents that happen in school as part of your general day to day operations. Follow this protocol during the critical incident.

A sample communication for parents to let them know what has happened and how the school is dealing with it is included in this guidance (Appendix 4). In some circumstances a helpline may be provided and the telephone number included with relevant information.

Careful consideration should be given to the use of any updated information provided on school web-sites and any information of this type should be agreed through Corporate Communications.

### Media

All media responses should be dealt with through Corporate Communications Team. Staff should not discuss the details of a crisis with the media and should direct all enquiries to the Corporate Communications Team who will consult with the school via a Senior Officer from the Education Service.

The Senior Officer will also take responsibility for dealing with reporters who, in some circumstances may be around the school building, trying to speak to parents or pupils. Staff and pupils should be alerted that the media may be present but that the authority is dealing with this and they should not feel pressured into saying anything.

### Suspected suicide

If suicide is suspected, the case will always be referred to a coroner as suicide is determined by an inquest. This process takes time and, on the evidence available, the coroner may not determine 'beyond reasonable doubt', that the deceased intended their actions to end their life. Often the coroner will return an open verdict, a narrative verdict or determine death by misadventure. This is especially likely with a young person's death.

When discussing a possible completed suicide it is best to keep to the facts; **a tragic chain of events has resulted in a death and the relevant authorities are looking into what happened.**

There should be extra attention given to the use of social media in the event of a completed suicide. Evidence strongly suggests that the setting up and use of R.I.P sites should be discouraged as they can often be seen to glamorise death and to reflect a more heroic sense to a completed suicide. For young people who are already faced with multiple life challenges, exposure to such sites is unhelpful. Although schools cannot control use of such sites, they should make their position clear and ask staff to be mindful of this position.

Increased awareness in schools around suicide can support young people developing empathy towards others experiencing thoughts of suicide, increased awareness in schools does not increase young people's risk of suicide. Further training in this area can be sourced through the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) programme which is delivered nationally. Local CAMHS helpline and Safeguarding processes should be deployed for any child causing especial concern.

Sometimes parents and adults in the wider community may share suicidal thoughts with trusted school staff. Mental Health First Aid training can help support adults in such an event.

#### Rumours

At some point it is likely that rumours may circulate. Such rumours are helpfully seen, in part, as a need to resolve uncertainties - they are generally 'explanations' of things which are unknown or inexplicable and an attempt to 'make sense' of things which are incomprehensible. For some children, the need to try to take control of a threatening situation by asserting opinions as fact is very powerful.

If rumours become problematic or malicious they may need to be dealt with by explaining the difference between fact and opinion and encouraging children to check the source of information. Reassuring children that staff will tell them the truth as facts and information emerges can help the rumours to be minimised and encourages pupils to trust the adults.

The plethora of social media platforms and devices has given rise to a range of ways for young people and the public to communicate with each other. Schools will already have on-going discussions with pupils about the appropriate use of this media and reminders on keeping safe on-line would be timely.

#### Models of coping

It's very human to want to talk over a shocking incident; it helps us process and accept what has happened and we want to know what other people are thinking. Adults and children alike will want to have these conversations with people they know and trust. Some people will be more affected than

others, either because of their relationship with those involved or because of other events in their own lives.

Do not be afraid that as a key adult working in school, becoming tearful or upset is either unprofessional or damaging for children. In reality the opposite is closer to the truth: teachers come into the profession because they care about children and if something distressing happens it is entirely congruent that teachers will be upset. Equally for children to see adults being able to tolerate and accept their own feelings in an open but contained way reassures them that these feelings are manageable and bearable. In other words children need to learn how to grieve; they do this by watching others.

Young People who experience grief have reported that the following types of supports can help:

- Extra time to finish work
- All teachers need to know – it is easy to miss the email
- Don't ask me why I am in the corridor – I won't be able to answer honestly
- Extra help from those who already know me
- 1:1 catch up time for work I have missed or when I've been struggling to concentrate
- The choice to know practical things and ask uncomfortable questions – the police investigation, what is crematorium, what happens at a funeral?
- If people offer opportunities to talk and for support, young people can choose to take them if they are not offer it is unlikely a young person will be able to find the words to ask at this time
- Emotions can seem overwhelming and young people may act out in very uninviting ways; even someone shouting can be a way of asking for help

### Traumatic Bereavement

Everyone grieves differently and at their own pace. However for some, trauma can prevent the grieving process and lead to longer-term effects on emotions, thoughts and behaviour akin to post traumatic stress. Traumatically bereaved children and young people experience significant distress and difficulties, over and above a more typical grief. Similarly, previous trauma can make any additional loss or bereavement traumatic.

In a traumatic bereavement, how the child or the young person experiences or understands the death – the meaning they make of it – results in it being experienced as traumatic. The trauma gets in the way of the typical process of grief and blocks the child or young person’s ability to process the loss.

Traumatic bereavement can be easily missed or misunderstood by parents, teachers and even bereavement practitioners, meaning that children’s difficulties are not recognised.

A portfolio of free, evidence-based resources is available for school staff, bereavement services and NHS mental health services, and include:

- Resources for schools and colleges: featuring a comprehensive written guide with supporting tools including videos, plus a 4-minute animation.
- Clinical resources: featuring an extensive practice guide and supporting videos to support those working therapeutically with children and young people.

<https://uktraumacouncil.org/resources/traumatic-bereavement>

<https://uktraumacouncil.org/traumatic-bereavement?lang=cy>

#### Funerals and Memorials

The attendance of pupils and staff at funerals needs to be carefully considered. Decisions should take account of the wishes of the family of the deceased and the understanding of the pupils from the school.

If pupil representatives are to go from school, permission from their parents should be sought and attention given to the emotional support available immediately after the funeral. Consideration should be given to the preparation of staff both prior to the funeral and after the service for emotional support.

A collection or memorial service may be considered but care should be exercised in the case of **suicide** as nothing should be done to glorify this event as in certain circumstances modelling behaviour can be triggered. A collection to be donated to an identified charity in the person’s name is an appropriate gesture with the family’s consent.

#### Planning for Related Events

Prepare for the possibility of other events related to the critical incident which could include any of the following:-

- **PRUDIC (Procedural Response to Unexpected Deaths in Childhood)**: The PRUDiC applies to all unexpected deaths in children from birth until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, whether from natural,

unnatural, known or unknown causes, at home, in hospital or in the community. This includes road traffic collisions, apparent suicides and murders. The PRUDiC procedure sets a minimum standard for a response to unexpected deaths in infancy and childhood. It describes the process of communication, collaborative action and information sharing following the unexpected death of a child and schools may be asked to provide relevant information to support this process.

- Hospital Visits
- A Fatal Accident Inquiry
- On-going Police Investigation
- A Trial which may be delayed or protracted
- Anniversaries
- **Practice review:** [Safeguarding practice reviews](#) are carried out on behalf of the regional safeguarding boards. They are a way for all partner agencies to identify the lessons that can be learned from particularly complex or difficult cases and to put changes in place to improve services in light of these lessons. The purpose of the review system is to promote a positive culture of multi-agency learning and best practice. School staff may be asked to participate in this process.

## **SUGGESTED ON-THE-DAY PROTOCOL FOR RESPONDING TO SERIOUS INCIDENTS**

### **Notify**

- Inform your Contact List
- Contact Corporate Communications if a media statement is required.  
Corporate Communications will manage this process.

### **Finalise the plan**

- Finalise the timetable for the day to allow for staff and children to be informed and distribute this plan with all staff
- Staff briefing: Arrange and communicate plans before the school day or during an interval, if news breaks during the school day
- Finalise what staff are to say to pupils (see appendix 3 for suggested script)
- Finalise communication to parents (see appendix 4 for suggested text for email)
- Agree with admin staff the wording of responses to any telephone enquiries.

### **Implement plan with monitoring from SLT**

#### **During the day remember:**

#### **Support**

- Support colleagues
- Identify vulnerable children and young people
- Increase availability of staff to support children and young people



Appendix 2 Key Contact List

Name	Position	phone	email
	Head teacher		
	Chair of Governors		
	Senior teachers (add rows as required)		
	Head of Service	01352 704190 07733 305766	<a href="mailto:claire.homard@flintshire.gov.uk">claire.homard@flintshire.gov.uk</a>
	School Lead Admin		
	Site manager		
	Pastoral or community link; church contact if faith school		
	Principal Educational Psychologist		<a href="mailto:linda.callaghan@flintshire.gov.uk">linda.callaghan@flintshire.gov.uk</a>
	YPCS Lead Counsellor		<a href="mailto:helen.rockhumphreys@flintshire.gov.uk">helen.rockhumphreys@flintshire.gov.uk</a>
	Care First		
	Corporate Communications	01352 702113 01352 702413	<a href="mailto:Judith.stringfellow@flintshire.gov.uk">Judith.stringfellow@flintshire.gov.uk</a> <a href="mailto:communication@flintshire.gov.uk">communication@flintshire.gov.uk</a>
	HR counsellor		

### Appendix 3 Telling Children Bad News

This may be done in classes or small groups. Whole school announcements should be undertaken with caution and only with good reason, perhaps in a small school. Staff need a little time to prepare for this task. They will need support from colleagues and possibly other professionals. Below is a suggested structure for a session in which children are to be told distressing news.

#### Overview

#### Preparation

- Explain that you have some very bad/difficult news to tell the class.
- Highlight that people react differently in these situations because everyone is an individual. Some people may be very upset, some people will feel less upset but there is no 'right or wrong' way to be. If anyone feels like crying (including you!) they can.

#### Facts

- Explain you will tell the children the facts as you understand them but that our understanding may change as new information becomes available. Don't be afraid to say that you don't know something or that the relevant authorities ( the police, the doctors) are looking into it and that can take time
- Stick to the facts, acknowledge uncertainty and don't speculate or make promises e.g. this won't happen to you/will never happen again.
- Emphasise the following, where appropriate
  - Accidents: No one is to blame.
  - Illness: The uniqueness of the person's situation.
  - Violent death or assault: The rarity of the event and how unlikely it is to happen to anyone.
- Be aware of the implications of language used so, saying someone "fell asleep"; was "lost" or "went to heaven" are likely to raise further questions (where is heaven? will they come back?) or anxieties about going to sleep or getting lost.
- Using the word 'died' is perfectly acceptable. For many children their understanding of death is worth exploring e.g. what has their previous experience been, particularly what happened after the person died. Very young children, for example, do not understand the abstract concept of death as a permanent state.

### ***Class or Group Discussion***

- Invite children to express their thoughts, to comment, ask questions and raise concerns. Validate these as appropriate but do not try to answer them all. Write down questions so they do not get lost and can be referred back to. Be aware of different cultural, social and religious beliefs e.g. some people think ..... but others believe..... What do you think?
- Don't be afraid of saying I don't know - it is honest and open. Don't be pressured into making decisions regarding belongings, seating arrangements, memorials, or tributes. Allow yourself thinking space to consider children's suggestions or ideas, they will need to be discussed with other people (school or family personnel) and can be revisited later.

### ***Conclusion***

End the session by saying how pleased/proud you are of how the children have responded. Explain that you all have lots to think about and talk about over the next days and weeks. Outline the plan for the rest of the day as you understand it - highlight any changes.

## Appendix 4 Communicating with parents and carers

### Sample text for letter to Parents/carers

Dear Parent/Carer,

It is with great sadness that I have to inform you about the (sad/sudden/unexpected) death of Xxx, one of our pupils/teachers/members of staff in [name of school]. The children/young people were told this morning by their class teacher/in assembly.

Xxx's family have given us permission to say that they died as a result of (an accident/illness/unexplained event) and the full details are not known at this stage. Our thoughts are with Xxx's family at this difficult time, and the whole school community sends them our sympathy and support. We will be considering a memorial in consultation with their relatives in due course but in the meantime, we are trying to keep school routines as normal as possible over the coming days whilst allowing the children/young people opportunities to talk about Xxx if they want.

Your child may or may not want to talk about it, but it is likely that s/he may need reassurance at this upsetting time. I have included some advice you may find useful, below. If you feel that your child needs extra support, please let us know. Yours sincerely,

**The following advice may be useful for sharing with parents in the initial stages of a critical incident.**

#### **Information for Parents**

It is normal for children to deal with upsetting news in different ways. It is very difficult to predict how any individual child will respond. Some children may be immediately sad or angry while for others, they will have no obvious response until something occurs that makes the loss 'real' or personally meaningful.

**When children are stressed or worried, it is normal for them to show some of these signs. They may be:**

- More clingy, anxious, emotional
- More difficult to put to bed, have difficulty going to sleep or staying asleep or have nightmares
- Needing to go to the toilet more often than usual
- Showing loss of acquired skills (e.g. wetting the bed, sleeping through independently)
- Finding routine skills more challenging
- Wanting to talk about what happened, or not wanting to talk
- Re-enacting a feature of the event through repetitive play / asking the same questions
- More likely to make "silly" mistakes, have difficulty concentrating or struggle to remember things
- More irritable or short tempered

- Experiencing physical symptoms e.g. feeling sick / headaches
- Showing a reduced sense of humour or be more 'moody' than normal

**These are some ways in which you may help your child:**

- Provide more reassurance than usual
- Stick to routines as far as possible
- Be understanding and accept your child's reactions to the circumstances
- Be available by providing time and support for your child to acknowledge his/her feelings
- Sensitively maintain the usual boundaries and expectations of behaviour
- Try to be consistent, clear and patient in what you say
- Acknowledge that the event was distressing but balance with re-assurance that the world is usually reliable, predictable and dependable.
- Make allowances for your child (and yourself)
- Listen to what your child is saying rather than what you think they might be saying. Don't deny or contradict your child's perceptions but appropriately challenge rumours or speculation.
- Be prepared to answer the same questions over and over, this can be your child's way of making sense of the situation.

**Most children cope well with "bad news" when they are given the kind of support suggested here.**

**However, if you have continuing concerns about your child, please seek advice from the school.**

## Appendix 5 Grief and Bereavement in Gypsy and Traveller Families

*The following is abridged from <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/information-grief-in-gypsy-traveller-families>*

Gypsy and Traveller communities have a higher death rate than the mainstream population. Figures show that they have the poorest life chances of any ethnic group in the UK. The nature of Traveller lifestyles increases their risk of poor health and death. Gypsies and Travellers have a shorter life expectancy than the mainstream population (by 10 years for men and 12 years for women), are more likely to experience the premature death of a child (17% compared to just under 10% of the wider population) and have a high suicide rate, particularly amongst young men.

The close-knit nature of these communities, with families who see each other on a daily basis, means that the death of an individual can be felt with great intensity, impacting a wide network of people. This makes death a very important part of Gypsies' and Travellers' lives, with a death becoming both a personal and a social loss and influencing their approach to the rituals surrounding death, such as funerals.

Children in Gypsy Traveller communities often take part in nearly all aspects of adult life, including all the rituals surrounding a death and the funeral. However, the protective nature of Traveller families may mean that the death of someone important to a child is often not openly talked about. It is normal for children and young people to react strongly to the death of someone close, even if the resulting feelings and behaviours look and feel far from normal. Children in Gypsy and Traveller communities are no different in this way. However, differences in cultural expectations in these communities highlight a general reluctance in some Gypsy and Traveller families to discuss bereavement and loss following a death. This may be a protective strategy and designed to shield family members from upset but it can inadvertently lead to difficulties in managing their grief. For children, this means that they may not have the emotional support they need to understand their feelings and to make sense of what has happened.

As with any family, when supporting Gypsy and Traveller families it is important to keep in mind the cultural attitudes and behaviours relating to death. Each family experiencing a death will have their own way of managing the bereavement and individual responses within the family may differ greatly in terms of the kind of support they need.

## **Funeral traditions**

Whilst each family is individual and will have their own ways of doing things, certain traditions held amongst Gypsies and Travellers may have an impact on the way each person grieves. Traditionally the trailer and all the possessions of the person who has died would have been burnt. Today they are more likely to be sold. This removing of memories and possessions means that any connection with the person who has died has gone. Children and young people can find the absence of reminders of someone who they may have been close to very difficult. The practice of 'sitting up', of not leaving the deceased alone from the time of death until the funeral, is common and may impact on family members in different ways. For many families, religion may be an important aspect of Traveller life and traditionally funerals in these communities take place quickly, particularly for Irish Travellers who are Catholic. This may limit the amount of time available to discuss how different family members would like things to be done. Gypsy and Traveller funerals may be extremely lavish and headstones ornate. These are seen as an expression of the very respected and valued place the individual held within both the family and the wider community. It is not unusual for people to travel a great distance across the country to attend a very elaborate event, with a perception that the larger the funeral, the greater the respect shown. In addition, the showing of such respect and the holding of extravagant services is seen as an illustration of the importance of the place that is held by the person who has died in the lives of the living.

## **Free ebook download 'It's Different Without You' by Carol Rogers**

<https://www.blurb.co.uk/b/5314302-it-s-different-without-you?ebook=478231>

This is self-published book for children based on the results of Carol's research looking at the bereavement experiences of Gypsy and Traveller families.

## **Appendix 6 Additional Support**

### **6.1 List of charities and helplines**

- 2 Wish Upon A Star  
Provides immediate support, counselling and support groups for parents who lose a child or young adult under 25 years of age suddenly and traumatically.

Tel: 01443 853125

Email: [support@2wishuponastar.org](mailto:support@2wishuponastar.org) [www.2wishuponastar.org](http://www.2wishuponastar.org)

- Anna Freud Centre

Provides training and resources to support whole school mental health and evidence based responses to traumatic loss

<https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/dealing-with-loss-and-bereavement>

- CALL Helpline  
A 24/7 helpline available with trained counsellors available for people to talk to about any aspect of mental health support. CALL also have a wide range of services to signpost to for further interventions/support. They also provide a text-support service.

<https://callhelpline.org.uk/>

- Child Bereavement UK  
Support for parents and children who have been bereaved.

Helpline: 0800 02 888 40

Email: [support@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:support@childbereavementuk.org) [childbereavementuk.org](http://childbereavementuk.org)

- The Child Death Helpline  
The Child Death Helpline is a helpline for anyone affected by the death of a child of any age, however recently or long ago. Calls are answered by a bereaved parent, trained and supported by professional staff. Please note this is a listening service not a counselling service although they can provide details of services in local areas.

Helpline (Free phone): 0800 282 986

Additional Free phone number for ALL mobiles: 0808 800 6019

The Helpline is open every day of the year

19.00 - 22.00, every evening

10.00 - 13.00, Monday - Friday 13.00 -

16.00, Tuesday - Wednesday

[www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk](http://www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk)

- The Compassionate Friends  
Support for bereaved parents and their families.

Helpline: 0345 123 2304

10.00 - 16.00/19.00 - 22.00 daily Email:

[helpline@tcf.org.uk](mailto:helpline@tcf.org.uk) [www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)



- Cruse Bereavement Care  
Support for anyone who is bereaved.

Helpline: 0808 808 1677 09.30 - 17.00, Monday – Friday Email:

info@cruse.org.uk [cruse.org.uk](http://cruse.org.uk)

- MEIC  
MEIC is the helpline service for children and young people up to the age of 25 in Wales. From finding out what's going on in your local area to help dealing with a tricky situation, Meic will listen even when no-one else will. We won't judge you and will help by giving you information, useful advice and the support you need to make a change.

<https://www.meiccymru.org>

- Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS) Support for those bereaved by suicide.

Helpline: 0300 111 5065 09.00 - 21.00 daily Email:

sobs.support@hotmail.com [www.uk-sobs.org.uk](http://www.uk-sobs.org.uk)

- Winston's Wish  
Support for bereaved children and young people aged up to 18 years.

Helpline: 08452 03 04 05

09.00 - 17.00, Monday – Friday Email:

info@winstonswish.org.uk

[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)

## 6.2 Support for staff

Staff may request additional emotional support in relation to specific incidents. This can be accessed through the following:

- Care First 0800 174319  
Flintshire's employee assistance programme. Freephone service, available 24/7 to all employees. Every call will be answered by a Care First counsellor, accredited to the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and support is available in Welsh, via a translation service, if required.

- Education Support - UK charity "dedicated to improving the mental health and wellbeing of the education workforce". Provides fully anonymous counselling from qualified BACP practitioners, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

0800 562 561

[www.educationsupport.org.uk](http://www.educationsupport.org.uk)

- National Education Union (NEU) and other relevant trade union organisations available to members
- Headrest - UK charity providing a free daily wellbeing telephone support service for head teachers <https://www.headrestuk.co.uk>

#### Appendix 7 Writing a whole school bereavement policy

A template of a draft policy document created by Winston's Wish and NAHT is available here:

<https://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/support-for-schools/> Contact

[linda.callaghan@flintshire.gov.uk](mailto:linda.callaghan@flintshire.gov.uk) for a PDF of the document